

# BORIS THE FIRST!

When *Boris Godunov* opens at the Gaiety Theatre in November, the event will feature a number of 'firsts'. It will be the first ever production of the work in Ireland; the edition presented will be Mussorgsky's first version, completed in 1869; and it will be Gidon Saks's first appearance with Opera Ireland, as well as his first time to sing Boris in Russian.

The Israeli-born bass comes to Dublin during a busy season that starts this month in London, where he will sing the villainous Caspar in English National Opera's new production of Weber's *Der Freischütz*. After his performances of Boris Godunov here, he goes to New York to sing another Boris, Katerina Ismailova's father-in-law in Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* at the Metropolitan. Then it's on to Canada for the title role

in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*; and finally to France for performances and a DG Archiv recording of Handel's *Hercules* with Les Musiciens de Louvre under Marc Minkowski.

The part of the guilt-ridden Tsar Boris is one of the truly great roles in the bass repertoire. But then, Boris Godunov is a truly great opera; and not just a great Russian opera, but one of the finest written anywhere during the 19th-century. Based on the play of the same name by Alexander

Pushkin (1799-1837), who's 200th

birthday we are celebrating this year, it is an epic drama taken straight from the pages of Russian history. And Mussorgsky's score is one in which the very soul of old Russia speaks out with force and conviction.



Artistic Director:  
Dieter Kaegi  
General Manager:  
David Collopy

## WINTER SEASON 1999

A new production of

### THE BARBER OF SEVILLE

(Il barbiere di Siviglia)

GIOACHINO ROSSINI

*Sung in Italian with English surtitles*

Figaro	Sam McElroy
Almaviva	Evan Bowers
Rosina	Patricia Fernandez
Basilio	Pavel Daniluk
Bartolo	Martti Wallen
Berta	Mary Brennan

Conductor	David Heusel
Director	Paul Suter
Designer	Stefanie Pastercamp

November 20, 22, 24, 26 & 28, 1999, at 7.30 pm

The Irish premiere of

### BORIS GODUNOV

(Original version 1869)

MODEST MUSSORGSKY

*Sung in Russian, with English surtitles*

Boris Godunov	Gidon Saks
Shuisky	Volker Vogel
Pimen	Stanislav Schwets
Grigory	Ivan Choupenitch
Fyodor	Christine Freiberg
Xenia	Michele Sheridan
Nurse	Deirdre Cooling Nolan
Shchelkalov	Oldrich Kriz
Varlaam	Gerard O'Connor
Missail	Alexandre Naoumenko
Inn hostess	Alexandra Durseneva
Simpleton	William Saetre

Conductor	Alexander Anissimov
Director	Ansgar Haag
Designer	Klaus Hellenstein

November 21, 23, 25 & 27, 1999, at 7.30 pm

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# THE REAL BORIS GODUNOV



Mussorgsky

The plot of *Boris Godunov* is based on events in Russian history at the turn of the 17th-century. When the Tsar Ivan the Terrible died in 1584 he was succeeded by the pious Feodor, who was in turn succeeded in 1598 by his brother-in-law, an able and ambitious boyar of Tartar origin, Boris Godunov. Ivan had left behind him also a young son, Dmitri, by a non-legal marriage. This boy was murdered in his ninth year, in 1591, and the instigator of the crime was believed in some quarters to have been Boris, although there is considerable doubt about his complicity in the affair. Boris died in April 1601, after having named his young son

Feodor as his successor. During the last year or two of Boris's life a claim to the throne of Russia had been put forward by an adventurer calling himself the genuine Dmitri – the child, he alleged, had escaped the assassins – but who seems to have been a

renegade monk named Gregory (Grishka) Otrepiev. This pseudo-Dmitri found plenty of willing supporters of his pretensions in Russia, where neither the strict rule nor the Tartar origin of Boris was in his favour; and he was backed also by Russia's hereditary enemy, the King of Poland, and by the Pope of Rome, Gregory having prudently recognised the Roman Catholic Church as the one true church when he put forward his claim to the Muscovite throne. After the death of Boris, the pseudo-Dmitri advanced with his Polish allies on Moscow, where he had himself proclaimed Tsar, after having married Marina Mnischek,

the daughter of a Polish magnate, the Voyevode of Sandomir. After a very short reign Dmitri was murdered in a popular uprising engineered by Prince Vassili Shuisky, who succeeded him as Tsar.

That's the straightforward historical background of Pushkin's drama of 1825. The history of Mussorgsky's opera, which was based on that work, is rather more complicated. Building mainly upon Pushkin's play of the same title, with a little assistance from ancient Russian chronicles, Mussorgsky wrote the music of his opera between October 1868 and May of the following year: the scoring was done between the summer and the mid-December of 1869.

Mussorgsky submitted his work to the Directorate of the Imperial Theatres in Petersburg in the summer of 1870, but it was rejected, presumably because it was thought that the unusual style of expression, the new and 'clumsy' orchestration and the lack of conventional musical form would upset audiences. Moreover, the work was considered to be dramatically weak. Mussorgsky



took the criticisms to heart and made sundry alterations in, abridgements of, and additions to, his score between about April 1871 and July 1872, when the orchestration of this second version was completed. Three scenes from this version were given in the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, on the 5 February 1873: a performance of the work as a whole, though with certain cuts, followed on the 27th January 1874 in the same theatre. By and large, the public was enthusiastic. But there was a powerful anti-Boris lobby amongst the musical hierarchy and the opera more or less disappeared after the composer's death in 1881.

Enter Nicolai Rimski-Korsakov. In 1896 he was moved to enhance the memory of his friend Mussorgsky by 'rescuing' *Boris Godunov* for posterity. And it was in Rimsky's edition, dramatically re-structured and with

the situation has been redressed and Mussorgsky's original thoughts are what now constitute the norm in the theatre as well as in recordings. Opera Ireland's production will take us back to the stark, tautly-realised drama of *Boris Godunov* as Mussorgsky originally conceived it, before a combination of bureaucrats and well-meaning friends robbed it of its unique expressiveness and sheer raw power.

### Boris I on record

The only available complete recording of the 1869 *Boris Godunov* is the Kirov Opera one on Philips (5CDs 462 230-2), conducted by the dynamic Valery Gergiev. The reason for the five CDs is that the set also includes a recording of the revised 1872 version.

And Philips have generously made the whole package

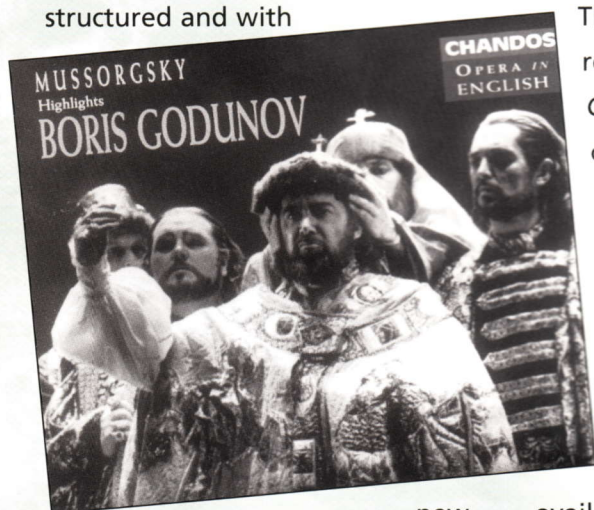
available at a three-CD price. Apart from Boris and Grigory, whose roles call for different vocal requirements in the two versions, the cast is common. The

eponymous protagonist has a proportionately larger role to play in the 1869 version, and Nikolai Putilin makes him a commanding presence right from his brooding first entry to his pathetic end. It's a sweeping performance and, as is now common, one that forswears most of the over-acting and vocal distortion favoured by the legendary Chaliapin and his later imitators..

There is also an admirable single-CD set of highlights in the Chandos mid-price Opera in English series (CHAN 3007). Based on Opera North's production in Davis Lloyd-Jones's English translation, this outstanding CD is authoritatively conducted by Paul Daniel and dominated by the searing intensity of John Tomlinson's Tsar.



*BORIS THE CAT: (illustration from Opera Cats by Susan Herbert) (Thames and Hudson 1997)*



new, highly romanticised scoring, that the opera conquered and held the stages of the world throughout most of the 20th-century. Happily,



# THE BARBER'S BAD BEGINNING



Cork-born Sam McElroy sings the title role in *The Barber of Seville*.

Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, the thirteenth of his thirty-nine operas, is probably the best-loved of all 19th-century Italian comic operas. It had, as we know, a bad beginning. In fact, its premiere at Rome's Teatro Argentina on 20 February 1816 was one of opera's mega-fiascos. The chapter of accidents attributed to that infamous opening night is long and detailed. How true many of them are is open to debate, but some of the incidents, as reported, are good for a retrospective belly-laugh

Roman opera audiences were notorious for giving premieres a hard time in any case, but young Rossini's opera came in for rougher treatment than most. When the composer walked out to conduct

the performance, he was wearing an ill-fitting hazel-coloured Spanish-style suit with gold buttons which his impresario Barbaja had given him to make him presentable. But it did not have quite the desired effect.

Immediately Rossini appeared, a wave of laughter, whistling and cat-calls broke

across the audience. As an eye-witness wrote, they could not believe 'that a man wearing a coat of that colour could possibly have the slightest spark of genius.'

There was worse to come. Halfway through the first act, Don Basilio swept dramatically on stage, heavy with make-up – and tripped over a trapdoor to fall flat on his face. As he picked himself up, his nose started to bleed. The delighted audience laughed and applauded – and demanded an encore. Then when Basilio tried to sing his 'Slander' aria, his nose went on bleeding profusely. His desperate attempts to staunch the flow with a large handkerchief in between breaths brought gales of laughter from the stalls. And when, during the finale, a cat

sidled into the middle of the stage, the audience's delight was complete. Figaro chased it off into the wings, but seconds later it reappeared from the other side. Soon it was hurtling itself into the arms of Dr Bartolo, and leaping onto Rosina and Berta as they ducked and weaved. And the audience lapped it all up, imitating its miaowing, and encouraging it by voice and gesture to proceed with its improvised role.

So much for the anecdotes. There is every reason to believe that the opera was going to have a rough ride, with or without its staging vicissitudes, due to the presence in the audience of a strong pro-Paisiello faction. Giovanni Paisiello, who was 60 years older than Rossini, had composed an opera on the same subject 34 years before, and his supporters saw the 24-year-old Rossini as an irreverent young upstart with too little respect for his elders and betters. But in fact, no fewer than six comedies and operas had already been based on Pierre-Auguste Caron de Beaumarchais' trilogy of plays about Figaro, and Figaro's story actually dates back to the masked comedies of the 17th century. It is extremely hard that Rossini should have been censured for walking on such well-trodden ground, especially since he asked Paisiello's permission, commissioned an entirely new libretto, prefaced it with a tribute to the venerable maestro, and reverently re-titled the opera



*Almaviva, ossia l'inutile Precauzione (Almaviva, or the Useless precaution)*. Indeed it was only called *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (The Barber of Seville) some time later.

When Mozart chose to attempt the Figaro story, he concentrated on the central 'marriage' play. But Rossini, though writing 30 years later, went back to the beginning and told the story of how the wily barber came to ingratiate himself with Count Almaviva. As librettist, he chose a young Roman civil servant, Cesare Sterbini (1784-1831), who had worked with him on *Torvaldo e Dorliska* in 1815. The role of Figaro presents a dramatist with a golden opportunity to address his audience on subjects of social inequalities and injustice. (He is such a political figure that he landed Beaumarchais in prison.) Sterbini made his Figaro witty, swaggering, wry and original – a master of the fast, convincing patter of an Italian wide-boy. His quick, agile sentences are perfectly matched by the patter of Rossini's scampering music.

Just as the Figaro character makes mocking fun of society, Rossini's score makes mocking fun of musical conventions of the time.



Gioachino Rossini

The characters in the opera are themselves made to complain about the cacophonous overblown finales they have to sing, and the climactic elopement in Act II is actually thwarted by the 'conventional' long-winded declarations of the two lovers.

One of the most remarkable things about The Barber is the speed of its composition; and all kinds of legends have grown up about it. Rapid composition was nothing unusual in those days, but Rossini was only commissioned to write *The Barber* by Duca Francesco Sforza-Cesarini, owner of the Teatro Argentina, a month before the opening night – a month in which Rossini had to find a subject, get the libretto written, write the music, have it copied, and rehearse the cast. But writing at speed was something Rossini was well used to. And one of the devices he occasionally resorted to was a deft re-cycling process whereby music from previous works were given a new lease of life in his latest creations. A good example of this is the overture to *The Barber*, a piece which is such an apt encapsulation of the work's comic ethos. It was actually written to precede the far more serious content of an earlier work, *Aureliano in Palmira* (Milan 1813). Indeed, Rossini also had used it, slightly revised, for *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*. (Naples 1815) before giving it a third airing in the form in which it is now best known.



BARBER ON THE TILES! (illustration from *Opera Cats* by Susan Herbert - Thames and Hudson 1997)

#### BARBER ON DISC

The 1992 budget-price set of *The Barber of Seville* on Naxos (3CDs 8 660027/9) is probably the best buy. Every note Rossini wrote for the work is included, and they are performed by a splendid cast of communicative singers who go at it with a great sense of fun. What's more, all of them have the flexibility to cope with the fiorature which one used to get only from the Rosina. Roberto Servile is a vibrant, characterful Figaro. And he is well matched by the Almaviva of Mexican tenor Ramon Vargas and Italian mezzo Sonia Ganassi, both then at the outset of their careers. Angelo Romero, who sang with DGOS in the early seventies, is a very funny Dr Bartolo who is abetted by the solid bass of Franco de Grandis's Don Basilio. Will Humburg conducts his cast and the Failoni Chamber Orchestra of Budapest with tremendous verve.



## ELEGANT NEW SETTING FOR OPERA LECTURES

The elegant, and comfortable, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre in Foster Place, just off College Green, is the venue for this season's Opera Ireland/Irish Times lectures by John Allen.

The programme for the season is as follows:

### Monday 20 September

**BEYOND THE THREE TENORS:** Opera as a communicative art, with recorded examples of how composers and their librettists 'keep the story going' within the musical conventions of their times.

### Tuesday 19 October

**THE LAST GREAT ROMANTIC:** A discussion of the operas of Richard Strauss, who died fifty years ago in 1949.

### Monday 8 November

**TSAR AND BARBER:** Previews of Opera Ireland's Winter productions of Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov and Rossini's Barber of Seville.

### Monday 6 December

**THE KARAJAN LEGACY:** A retrospective look at some of the operatic recordings of the legendary Herbert von Karajan, who died ten years ago.

### Monday 31 Jan

**LADIES FIERCE AND FEY:** 19th-century Italian opera heroines and their diverse characters.

### Monday 28 February

**LA BELLE EPOQUE:** A dip into the delights of French opéra.

### Monday 13 March

**RING OF BRIGHT MELODY:** Memories of a once-popular trio of Victorian operas by Balfe, Wallace and Benedict.

### Monday 8 April

Preview of Spring Opera Season.

All lectures start at 8 pm. Admission is free.

Parking available for members in Fleet Street Car-Park.

Direct entrance from car-park to Arts Centre.

## OPERA IRELAND NEWS

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## OPERA ON RADIO

Saturday is opera night on Lyric FM. The following list, which is subject to change, contains the most up-to-date information on scheduled broadcasts during the coming months.

Sept 18, L'amico Fritz (Mascagni) presented by John Allen  
Sept 25, Salome (Strauss) Opera Ireland Spring production  
Oct 2, Rodelinda (Handel) OTC production  
Oct 9, La traviata (Verdi) Opera Ireland Spring production  
Oct 16, Siberia (Giordano) from Wexford Festival  
Oct 23, Straszny dwór (Moniuzko) from Wexford Festival  
Oct 30, Die Königin von Saba (Goldmark) from Wexford Festival  
Nov 6, Martha (Flotow) presented by John Allen  
Nov 13, 20, 27 & Dec 4 to be announced

### LIVE FROM THE METROPOLITAN OPERA

Dec 11, Lucia di Lammermoor (Donizetti)  
Dec 18, Tristan und Isolde (Wagner)  
Dec 25, Le nozze di Figaro (Mozart)  
Jan 1, The Great Gatsby (Harbison)  
Jan 8, Tosca (Puccini)  
Jan 15, Rigoletto (Verdi)  
Jan 22, Cavalleria rusticana (Mascagni) and Pagliacci (Leoncavallo)  
Jan 29, Der Rosenkavalier (Strauss)  
Feb 5, La traviata (Verdi)  
Feb 12, Les contes d'Hoffmann (Offenbach)  
Feb 19, Mefistofele (Boito)  
Feb 26, Madama Butterfly (Puccini)  
Mar 4, The Merry Widow (Lehár)  
Mar 11, La Cenerentola (Rossini)  
Mar 18, Lady Macbeth of Mtzenk (Shostakovich)  
Mar 25, Das Rheingold (Wagner)  
April 1, Die Walküre (Wagner)  
April 8, Pelléas et Mélisande (Debussy)  
April 15, Siegfried (Wagner)  
April 22, Götterdämmerung (Wagner)

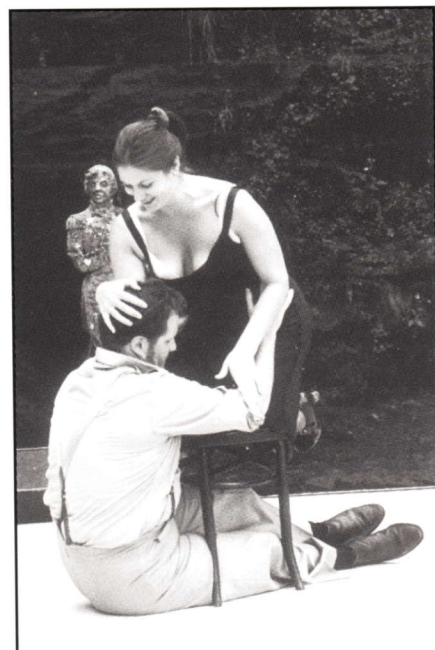
## LET'S BE E-MAIL PALS!

Opera Ireland would like to hear from members and friends who can be reached at an e-mail address. We are about to launch a new e-mail newsletter which will carry up-to-the-minute information and news. So, if you want to be amongst the first to know what's going on in the world of opera, why not send your e-mail address NOW to, info@opera-ireland.ie



# CO-OPERA TAKES CARMEN TO CUMBRIA

The craggy precipice at Corby Castle in Cumbria provided a dramatic backdrop for the final performance of Co-Opera's tour of *Carmen*. Dr Edward Haughey invited the company to perform the opera *alfresco* at his famous north-west England estate on 21 August as part of the celebrations to mark the restoration of the castle's famous man-made cascade. In deference to performers and audience, as well as to Bizet's music, the roaring waters were silenced for the occasion. But they came crashing down again as a dramatic enhancement of the moment when Carmen was killed at the opera's climax.



Karen England and Craig Downes as Carmen and Don José.

The title role was sung by Karen England, with Craig Downes as her obsessed lover Don José. Michaëla, the other woman in his life, was sung by Constance Novis, standing in for Róisín Toal, who had taken the role during the tour in Ireland. Martin Higgins was the toreador Escamillo and other roles were taken by Sandra Oman, Tamsin Dalley (for Amanda Pyke), Tom Cregan and Nyle Wolfe.

Director Michael Hunt adapted his own production of the opera, which he up-dated to the 1930s

and relocated in South America. Andrew Synnott conducted, using a score arranged for small tango ensemble by Rob Lane and Simon Whiteside. The costumes were designed by Madeline Fry; but Alison Nalder's original set was replaced, for this performance only, by the location's own rocky splendour.

The Cumbria engagement was the final chapter in another success story for Opera Ireland's associate touring company. During the previous few weeks Co-Opera had

played the production to enthusiastic audiences at venues around Ireland. Packed houses acclaimed it in Galway, Kilkenny, Derry, Longford, Sligo and Waterford as well as in the 1,000-plus-seat Cork Opera House. There were also special performances at two unlikely Dublin venues, the rock and cabaret-oriented Vicar Street and the garden of the Merrion Hotel. In all, over 6,000 people attended the sixteen performances.



(Photos: Michael Hunt)



# MEMORIES OF SPRING

**Merited acclaim for Regina Nathan.**

'This is actually as gripping a Traviata as the Gaiety has heard for a long time ... Regina Nathan ... is a strongly-characterised Violetta, both radiant and intimate, revealing with skill her internal conflicts of will and compassion. Audiences at the Gaiety are not accustomed to singing with the detailed emotionalism and finely-gauged responses she offered, and the unequivocal nature of their enthusiastic response on the opening night ranks as a clear personal triumph.'

*Irish Times*



*La Traviata*



# SPELL-BINDING SALOME

Salome proved to be spell-binding ... In all departments it was outstanding ... Karen Notare brought a vivid interpretation with splendidly secure singing ... John Wegner was a powerful Jokanaan, physically and vocally strong, and Volker Vogel was an effortless Herod.  
*Opera Magazine*

Director Joël Lauwers and designer Louis Desiré have come up with a production rich in symbols of decadence. *Irish Times*

Lauwers and Desiré provided an eye-catching set and involved the huge cast in every nuance of the drama. *Opera Magazine*

Musically it is a splendid achievement. *Irish Independent*

Under the inspirational baton of Laurant Wagner, they (the RTÉCO) delivered the score to near perfection. *The Examiner*

The RTÉCO produced a rich and authentic Straussian sound under the outstanding young French conductor Laurant Wagner. *Sunday Independent*

Karen Notare is stunning in the title role. *Irish Independent*

Notare scales the role's huge range with powerful, visceral singing and effects the burgeoning sexuality of adolescence by way of movement and her youthful figure. *Evening Herald*

John Wegner was a powerful Jokanaan, singing with controlled volume and acting out the erotic drama like a man possessed. *Sunday Independent*

John Wegner, as Jokanaan ... combines an arresting voice with a great physique. *Evening Herald*

There was a compelling performance by Swiss mezzo-soprano Julia Juan as Herodias – her scenes with Herod, sung and acted with great aplomb by German tenor Volker Vogel – being among the highlights of a richly rewarding evening. *Sunday Independent*

The large supporting cast was really excellent ... Laurent Wagner drew marvellous singing from everyone and a stunning performance from the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. *Opera Magazine*

Salome

(Photos: Tom Lawlor)





# OPERA

## AT HOME

John Allen recommends some recent opera recordings on CD

With only a few exceptions, most of the significant new opera recordings are of works hitherto not well represented in the catalogues. For mainstream favourites, the best buys are usually to be found in the mid-price re-issues of successful recordings from the past. There has been a veritable flood of these from the main distributors during the year, and I have listed some of the best of them at the end of this article.

### THREE OF THE BEST FROM PAPPANO

Antonio Pappano, the fast-rising 'new kid on the operatic block' is currently recording a Puccini cycle for EMI Classics. The latest instalment, *Il trittico* (3CDs CDS5 56587-2), is a veritable triumph for him and his singers. Wisely, he and EMI have avoided using a common cast for all three operas, so we get the best voices in appropriate roles throughout. The young Italian baritone Carlo Guelfi is a splendidly dark-hued Michele in *Il tabarro*; and he is supported by the passionate singing of the experienced Maria Guleghina and Neil Shicoff as the clandestine lovers. José van Dam, a surprise choice as Gianni Schicchi, uses his powers of vocal colouring to portray a comically conniving protagonist who can produce a flood of full-flavoured tone when required. The romantic relief in this hilarious hour of comedy is provided by Angela Gheorghiu and Roberta Alagna, no less. The most exciting singing of all, though, comes from the Chilean soprano Cristina Gallardo-Domàs in the title role of *Suor Angelica*. Her creamy tone, and her control of dynamics, from full-blooded fortes to whispered pianissimos, offers some of the best Puccini singing I have heard in a long time – yes, even better than Gheorghiu.



### STRAUSS, 50 YEARS ON

The record companies have been slow to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Richard Strauss's death on 8 September 1949. But the little that has appeared is very good, most notably the Chandos recording of *Salome* conducted by Michael Schönwandt on CHAN 9611(2). Inga Nielsen's silvery soprano conveys every aspect of Salome's complex personality credibly as she moves effortlessly from childlike eagerness, through growing lust and petulance, to ultimate sexual gratification and triumphalism. She encompasses the long, arched phrases of the lurid final scene with stunning virtuosity. Her real-life husband, Robert Hale, is a rock-steady Jochanaan whose slight tonal dryness makes for a convincing portrayal of a man just in from years in the desert. Reiner Goldberg and the veteran Anja Silja are splendid as the degenerate royal couple; Deon van der Walt is a refreshingly lyrical Narraboth and the lesser parts are well done, apart from an unsteady First Nazerene.

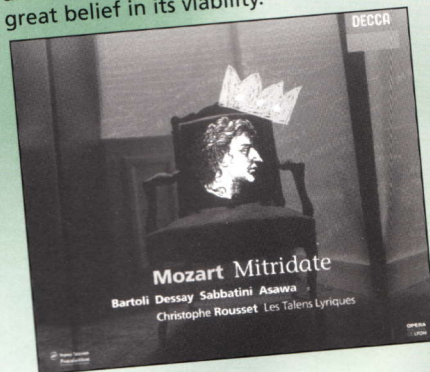


Deutsche Grammophon has come up with a live *Der Rosenkavalier* conducted by Herbert von Karajan at the 1960 Salzburg Festival (3CDs 453 200-2). The strings of the Vienna Philharmonic are ravishing, even in mono, and the cast is one to die for. Lisa della Casa (Marshallin), Sena Jurinac (Octavian) and Hilde Gueden (Sophie) were the supreme Strauss sopranos of that time and their performances, individually and in ensemble, are exquisite. Otto Edelmann, firm of voice and clear in diction, straddles a fine line between arrogance and vulgarity; and there is a strong supporting cast, headed by the great Erich Kunz as Faninal and with the bonus of Giuseppe Zampieri's ringing Italian Tenor.

If you only want the highlights from *Der Rosenkavalier*, look no further than the Chandos single-disc selection (CHAN 3022), sung in English by Yvonne Kenny, Diana Montague and Rosemary Joshua. Kenny fills out her role with a stream of sensuous tone and Montague is a vibrant Octavian. Together, they make the poignant closing pages of Act 1 something you want to instantly re-play. Indeed, all three women sing radiantly throughout, and they are complemented by John Tomlinson's hugely enjoyable Ochs. David Parry draws rich Straussian sounds from the London Philharmonic Orchestra.

### MOZARTIAN VOCAL DELIGHTS

Lovers of fine Mozart singing should investigate the new Decca recording of *Mitridate, re di ponto* (3CDs 460 772-2). Mozart was only fourteen when he composed the work for Milan in 1770. As a piece of theatre, it's not exactly riveting; but the voices in this recording are. In the title role, Giuseppe Sabbatini offers more elegant and expressive tenor singing than you would hear from many an Italian tenor, while American counter-tenor Brian Asawa gets as near as one can nowadays to the pure castrato sound of the original Farnace. Good as the men are, they are bettered by the wonderful singing of Cecilia Bartoli as Sifare (another castrato role) and Natalie Dessay as his/her lover Aspina. Their duet "Se viver non degg'io", the only one in the opera, is a thing of rare beauty. Christopher Rousset directs the original-instrument group Les Talens Lyriques, and indeed the whole performance, with great belief in its viability.



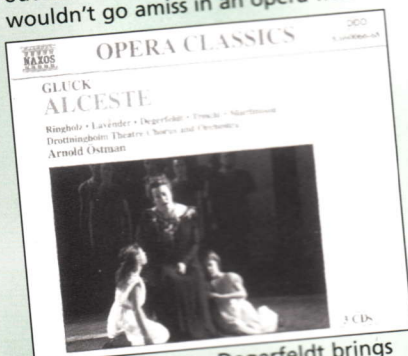
### GLUCK AND THE GREEKS

Gluck is becoming quite popular in the recording studios. I have enjoyed hearing two new period-instrument performances: Archiv Produktion's *Armide* (2CDs 459 616-2) with Les Musiciens du Louvre conducted by Marc Minkowski; and *Alceste* from Naxos (3CDs 8.660066/8), recorded at



Drottningholm. *Armide* (1777), was the second of the five new operas Gluck wrote for Paris. Marc Minkowski's thrusting way with the pacing may surprise some, but I like it. French soprano Mireille Delunsch convincingly puts across *Armide's* varying emotions – and they range widely, from tenderness to towering rage – by purely musical means. Her Act 3 lament "Ah! Si la liberté" is particularly touching and she rises to great heights of dramatic intensity in her furious scene at the end of the opera. American tenor Charles Workman (Renaud) is a stylish artist whose sometimes baritone timbre can produce singing of extreme delicacy, as in his Act 2 aria where he beholds the beauties of *Armide's* magic garden. Both singers shine in the big Act 5 duet, the piece that foreshadows Berlioz's love scene for Dido and Aeneas in *Les troyens*. Ewa Podles makes a strong impact as La Haine (Hate) and the supporting cast is an impressive one.

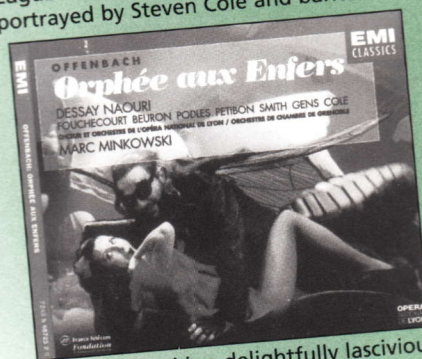
Naxos have recorded the original 1767 Italian version of *Alceste*. Like Delunsch in *Armide*, American soprano Teresa Ringholz takes a cooler view of the heroine's predicaments than some of her weightier predecessors in the role. But that is perfectly in keeping with Gluck's classical style. I liked her cleanly projected singing and I found that her intensity increased as the drama developed. English tenor Justin Lavender, on the other hand, opts for weight rather than finesse as *Alceste's* husband Admetus. He is impressive in his impassioned outbursts, but a little more restraint wouldn't go amiss in an opera from



this period. Jonas Degerfeldt brings considerable style to the second tenor role of Evander and the rest of the young-sounding cast is impressive. Arnold Östman conducts his cast and Drottningholm choral and instrumental forces with a good sense of dramatic urgency.

## GREEKS DOWN UNDER

Gluck's penchant for setting Greek mythological subjects to music frequently served as fodder for Jacques Offenbach's satirical gifts. The prime example is surely *Orphée aux Enfers*, which has appeared on EMI Classics (2CDs CDS 56725-2) in a delightful performance conducted by the versatile Marc Minkowski. The splendid cast of mainly French singers is headed by the effervescent Eurydice of Natalie Dessay, whose thrilling coloratura seems to me to keep on getting better and better as her career progresses. Polish mezzo Ewa Podles is a tad over-the-top as the pedantic Public Opinion, but there are delightful contributions from Patricia Petibon as Cupid, Jennifer Smith as Diane and the estimable Baroque and Mozart soprano Véronique Gens as Vénus. All of the men are good. Yann Beuron is well cast as the not-particularly-bereaved Orphée. Pluton is stylishly sung by the elegant tenor Jean-Paul Fouchécourt. Lugubrious John Styx is convincingly portrayed by Steven Cole and baritone



Laurent Naouri is a delightfully lascivious Jupiter. Minkowski keeps the show moving along at a fairly cracking space. I would prefer to have had more rhythmical pointing, but one must be thankful for the sparkle that pervades the whole enterprise and, above all, the essential French-ness of the performance.

## OPERA IN ENGLISH

The Chandos Opera in English series continues to flourish. Recent additions include Gounod's *Faust* (3CDs CHAN 3014[3]) and Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* (2CDs CHAN 3027[2]). The cleanly focused soprano of Mary Plazas is heard in both, partnered by a sometimes-too-stentorian Paul Charles Clarke in the former and the stylish, and suitably Italianate, Barry Banks in the latter. Alastair Miles is an impressive, knowing Mephistopheles; as Dulcamara, Andrew Shore's crystal clear diction assures that we hear every word of Arthur Jacob's inventive verses. David Parry, the regular conductor in this series, sometimes allows his slowish speeds to compromise the dramatic flow of the action in *Faust*. He is much fleetier in Donizetti.

However good the new issues in this series are, they are decidedly upstaged by re-issues of three Charles Mackerras-led recordings by English National Opera forces from the past. Dame Janet Baker



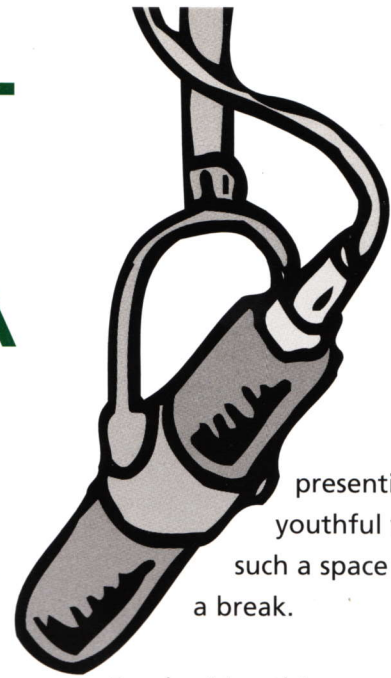
sings the title roles in two of them, Donizetti's *Mary Stuart* (2CDs CHAN 3017[2]) and Handel's *Julius Caesar* (3CDs CHAN 3019[3]). Valerie Masterson is Sextus in the latter and she also stars in *La traviata* (2CDs CHAN 3023[2])

## TREASURES FROM THE RECENT PAST

EMI Classics have re-issued their famous Riccardo Muti *Macbeth* (2CDs CMS 67128-2), with Sherrill Milnes and Fiorenza Cossotto, and Bellini's *Il pirata* (2CDs CMS 67121-2) with Montserrat Caballé. They have also commemorated the Poulenc centenary with a 5CD box containing his three operas, including the famous premiere recording of *Dialogues des Carmélites* conducted by George Prêtre, as well as other miscellaneous vocal items. There are some welcome returns in the Double-Decca series (two-CD sets with no librettos), including the first of Joan Sutherland's *La traviata* recordings (460 759-2), the one with Carlo Bergonzi and Robert Merrill; *Un ballo in maschera* (460 762-2) with Pavarotti and Tebaldi; and Delibes's *Lakmé* (460 741-2) with Sutherland and Alain Vanzo. Deutsche Grammophon have resurrected three Verdi winners: Carlos Kleiber's *La traviata* (459 039-2) with Cotrubas, Domingo and Milnes; and two Giulini sets; *Rigoletto* (457 753-2) with Cappuccilli, Cotrubas and Domingo; and *Falstaff* (459 046-2) with Renato Bruson. DG have also re-furbished the Karajan Ring from the 1960s (14CDs 457 780-2 – each opera also available separately) which I shall be discussing in the Opera Ireland/Irish Times lecture on "The Karajan Legacy" at the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre on Monday 6 December.



# A MIKE AT THE OPERA



For some time there have been stories circulating of how amplification was being used surreptitiously in large opera houses around the world. But they have been hard to pin down. Now comes more concrete, not to say disquieting, news from two authoritative sources. Rodney Milnes wrote about the situation in the August issue of *Opera*, and the following article by Will Crutchfield appeared recently in *The New York Times*.

So the New York City Opera will bring in the loudspeakers.

As Anthony Tommasini reported in *The New York Times* [Aug. 3], the city's "second" opera company, long known for its cultivation of young American voices and for the frustratingly muted acoustics of the State Theater where it presents them, will begin this season to rely on "sound enhancement" and deliver those voices through electronic way-stations between the singers' bodies and the public's ears.

I had thought this would start differently, and at least a little bit later: Andrea Bocelli, I supposed, would be the Trojan horse. The blind pop-tenor, whose voice is pretty enough and Italianate enough to connect with operatic

style but neither sufficiently powerful nor sufficiently developed to sing "real" opera, has announced the intent to parlay his enormous popularity into the fantasy of performing staged opera with established co-stars (beginning with a *Werther* production opposite the velvet-voiced Denyce Graves in Detroit). Everybody figures that Mr. Bocelli would need amplification; it doesn't take much additional figuring to realise that his "legit" colleagues could be at a disadvantage if they put their naked voices beside whatever the sound-staff sends out for the tenor.

And once the line is crossed – well, a lot of people are waiting for the telegenic Italian mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli to sing *Carmen*. And here is a way whereby, despite the small sound she produces and the dramatic demands of that score, she could. I thought that might be Step Two.

But it makes sense that the City Opera and its general director, Paul Kellogg, should have gotten out in front on this issue. Their theatre was built for dancing; the same stage that is supposed to muffle footfall tends to muffle voices a bit as well. Anyone can understand why a company

presenting youthful voices in such a space could use a break.

Emphasising this aspect, however, distracts from the real picture. Yes, the acoustic is less than ideal – but nobody had trouble hearing Beverly Sills, Samuel Ramey, Faith Esham or Richard Leech from that stage, and they were "young American singers" too. The underlying issue is how we sing and how we listen, and both of those things have been changing.

The quality of a sound travelling through space to the human ear is one of the most mysterious of phenomena. Anyone who thinks it is not substantially altered through electronic intervention is kidding himself. Anyone who assumes that the disciplines of good singing will be automatically maintained as the practical need for them recedes is kidding himself. Anyone who believes that a careful and subtle introduction of the concept ensures care and subtlety down the road is kidding himself. The mikes won't change everything overnight: the process is more incremental, with the vocal community responding subtly to the changed sound-environment, which will in turn adjust to the

*Continued on page 14*



# A FACELIFT FOR THE GRAND OLD LADY

Dublin's Gaiety Theatre, the Grand Old Lady of South King Street as it is sometimes called, is to undergo extensive renovation next year. The 128-year-old theatre, which has been home to opera in Dublin since the last century, has been awarded a grant of £500,000 by the National

Millennium Committee. And this will be matched by the theatre's new owners, Caroline and Denis Desmond, bringing the total sum available up to a million pounds.

This money, according to the Gaiety's Executive Director, John Costigan, will form part of the funding for an overall development and conservation plan for the theatre. In addition to restoring and enhancing the building's front exterior, it is planned to refurbish the auditorium, remove some of those inconvenient pillars, and generally upgrade the standard of comfort for patrons. There will also

be some upgrading of production facilities, but not yet the enlargement of stage and orchestra pit that is so badly needed for better opera and ballet presentations.

The Gaiety refurbishment is intended to tie-in with Dublin Corporation's environmental improvements to South King Street itself. Phase I of the scheme will include pavement widening, the removal of on-street car parking and the creation of a new pedestrian plaza outside the Gaiety. Later modifications will include a landscaped pedestrian area at the junction with Mercer Street.

## TARAGH WINS MAJOR MARKETING AWARD

Taragh Loughrey-Grant, Opera Ireland's Marketing Executive, has won the Best Marketing Graduate Award at the annual Marketing Awards run by the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMIAI) in association with Avis Rent-A-Car. Taragh was presented with her award by the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Dr James McDaid, and Avis Sales & Marketing Manager Dermott Carberry at a special ceremony in Dublin.



Taragh Loughrey-Grant with Avis Sales & Marketing Manager Dermott Carberry and Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Dr James McDaid.



GOLFING FOR OPERA: Declan O'Shea, Donal Singleton and team captain John Ryan, three members of the winning Entropy Ltd team at the 1999 Opera Ireland Golf Classic at Luttrellstown Castle on 14 May. Missing from the picture is Tony McDonagh.

## GROVE DICTIONARY WINNER

The winner of the magnificent *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* in our competition held in association with last season's Opera Ireland/Irish Times lecture series was Mr Douglas Hyde of Castleknock in Dublin.

## LOVE & MUSIC



There are still a few copies of Gus Smith's history of the Dublin Grand Opera Society available. The price is £10, include postage. Send your remittance directly to: Gus Smith, Clarendon, Raglan Road, Dublin 4



changed singing, bit by bit, perhaps slowly enough that nobody will be able to pin-point the moment at which the "real thing" was lost.

Or perhaps not so slowly: Look at Broadway, where it took less than thirty years for natural sound to be supplanted across the board by sound systems for which "crass" and "blatant" are among the nicest possible terms of description. And who now sings there the way, say, Julie Andrews or Barbara Cook or Robert Rounseville sang? Instead, hoarse tremulous rasping. Why? Because when singers force emotion through their throats, but have not learned the technical disciplines of channelling that force into a resonant, space-travelling sound, then you get hoarseness, tremulousness and rasp.

And that's what some music is based on and written for; other music shifts for itself as best it may. Can anyone be surprised that during the same decades that sound has been depersonalised – snatched from the throat of the singer into the omnivorous speaker system – Broadway style in general has been snatched from the personalities of individual artists to the omnivorous blockbuster production? Do you know who is currently singing in *Cats* or *Les Miz*? Does it matter?

The opera world had better be thinking these thoughts - but the thinking had better not stop with such gloomy associations, because we have to ride the horse in the direction it is going. Amplified

sound is the sound of today. The people who remember unmiked political oratory are getting old. Even Sunday sermons that rely on a well-produced speaking voice are rare.

The last President with sufficient vocal timbre even to consider speaking *au naturel* was Ronald Reagan, and he didn't. If Bill Clinton tried, nobody would hear him. And we've adjusted, and so will opera. In fact we have already been adjusting for a long time. Most opera lovers already listen to records at least as often as they go to the theatre. And records have long been changing – incrementally, indirectly, in ways that are sometimes contradictory and hard to pin down – the sounds we expect, the way we listen to those sounds, the way singers' careers are made, and the way they sing.

Importing these changes frankly and directly into the opera house itself is a big step, because up to now the "reality check" of live performance has served as a restraining counterbalance to their influence. Mr. Kellogg has crossed the Rubicon (in the company of a few Europeans; see the August issue of *Opera* magazine). He may face a chorus of protest. But I doubt it will last long and I don't think it is productive to join in. What is useful here is for the people who care about good singing and understand its cultivation to make sure their influence is felt, not as a grudging drag against the inevitable, but as a positive (and cautionary) guide

to carry as much of the "old" essence of opera as possible into the new era.

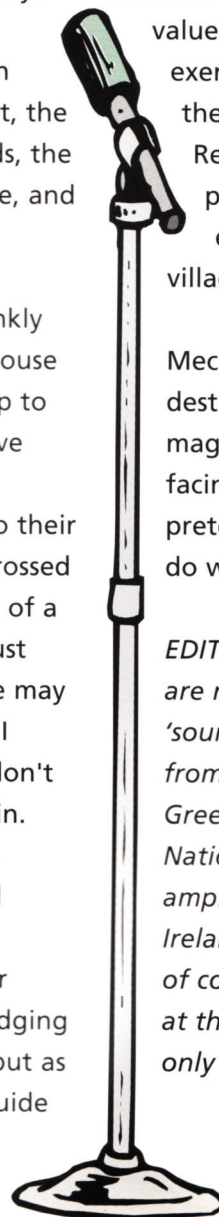
We're going to have to accept that the listeners who notice this and care about these things will probably be a minority, a kind of "niche market," and possibly even a shrinking one as habits change and amplification techniques improve. Think of TV dinners circa 1965 and flash-frozen Lean Cuisine today: as pre-cooked meals get better, fewer people continue to insist that only fresh-cooked will do.

Yet there is still a difference. And niche markets can be nourished, cultivated and promoted, and the values to which they cater can exercise a good influence on the mass market as well.

Remember that chilling phrase from the Vietnam era: "we had to destroy the village in order to save it"?

Mechanical sound-processing is destructive of one of the most magical elements of opera, and facing that is better than pretending otherwise. But we do want to save it.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: We in Dublin are not above using a little 'sound enhancement' ourselves from time to time. Bernadette Greevy's Carmen at the National Concert Hall was amplified; so was the Opera Ireland/RTÉ Gypsy Baron. And, of course, every musical event at the Point Depot is heard only through the loudspeakers.*





# IRISH OPERA DIARY Autumn/Winter 1999/2000

Information as available at end of August

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre, College Green

Monday 20 Sept. At 8 pm  
BEYOND THE THREE TENORS: John Allen on opera as a communicative art, with recorded examples of how composers and their librettists 'keep the story going' within the musical conventions of their times.

## Lyric Opera Productions

Dublin, National Concert Hall  
Tel: (01) 475 1572; Fax: (01) 475 1507;  
E-mail: info@nch.ie

Oct 2, 7.30 pm

AIDA (Verdi)

Semi-staged concert performance,  
Sung in Italian

Nancy Yuen, Linda Hibberd, Khosrow Mahsoori, John Fletcher, Sandra Oman, Eugene Armstrong, John Milne; c. David Angus;  
p. Vivian Coates

## Opera Theatre Company

Booking (01) 679 4962

THE WALL OF CLOUD

Sung in English

A new opera by Raymond Deane

Nicola Sharkey, Eugene Ginty, Colette McGahon, Sinéad Blanchfield;  
c. David Adams; p. Jason Byrne;  
d. Johanna Connor

13 October: First Performance:

Longford Backstage Theatre

15/16 October: Dublin Theatre

Festival, Samuel Beckett Centre, TCD,

18 October: Belfast BT Studio,

Waterfront Hall

21 October: Kilkenny, Watagate Theatre

23 October: Wexford,

St Peter's College

## Wexford Festival Opera

Wexford, Theatre Royal

Tel: (053) 22144; Fax: (053) 47438;

E-mail: info@wexfordopera.com

October 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 8 pm

DIE KÖNIGIN VON SABA (Goldmark)

Sung in German

Mauro Nicoletti /Valerij Popov (23, 26),

Teresa Matlova, Vladimir Glushchak,

Piotr Nowacki, Max Wittges, Cornelia

Helfricht, Inka Rinn; c. Claude

Schnitzler; p. Patrick Mailler; d.

Massimo Gasparon.

October 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 8 pm

STRASNY DWÓR (Moniuszko)

Sung in Polish

Iwona Hossa, Viktoria Vizin, Dariusz

Stachura, Jacek Janiszewski, Zenon

Kowalski, Zbigniew Macias,

Piotr Nowacki, Elizabeth Woods, Lesek

Swidzinski; c. David Jones;

p. Michal Znaniecki; d. Francesco

Calcagnini.

October 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 8 pm

## SIBERIA (Giordano)

Sung in Italian

Elena Zelenskaia, Claudia Marchi,  
Massimo Giordano, Dario Volonté,  
Walter Donati, Darren Abrahams,  
Zbigniew Macias, Chloë Wright, Eldar

Aliev; c. Daniele Callegari;

p. Fabio Sparvoli; d. Giorgio Richelli

and Alessandra Torella

OPERA SCENES

White's Barn, White's Hotel,

afternoons at 3.30 pm (except where

stated)

October 17, 20, 23(11 am), 26, 29

LA SCALA DI SETA (Rossini)

Sung in Italian

Carl Gombich, Raymond Armstrong,

Darren Abrahams, Roland Davitt,

Daniella Pellizzari, Alison Kettlewell;

md. Rosetta Cucchi; p. Sara Zampetti

October 16, 19, 22, 25, 28 (11 am)

THE THREEPENNY OPERA (Weill)

Sung in English

Stewart Kempster, Clare McCaldin,

Niamh O'Brien, Kevin Ferguson,

Daniel Broad, Karmel, Trina Bulych,

Tony Norton. Md. John Shea;

p. Debora Virello

October 15, 18, 21, 24 (11 am), 27, 30

(11 am)

FAUST (Gounod)

Sung in French

Massimo Giordano, Chloë Wright,

Franti Zahradnicek, Vladimir Glushchak.

Teresa Matlova, Christina Wilson,

Stewart Kempster; md. Ljuba

Orfenova

## Chisinau National Opera

NABUCCO (Verdi)

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Oct 18, Dublin, National Concert Hall.

7.30 pm,

Oct 20, Cork Opera House, 8 pm

Oct 22, Limerick University Concert

Hall, 8 pm,

Oct 25, Belfast, Waterfront hall,

8 pm

LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (Mozart)

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Oct 19, Dublin, National Concert Hall.

7.30 pm

Oct 21, Cork Opera House, 8 pm

Oct 23, Limerick University Concert

Hall, 8 pm

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,

College Green, Tuesday 19 Oct, 8pm.

THE LAST GRAEAT ROMANTIC: John

Allen commemorates the 50th

anniversary of the death of Richard

Strauss.

## Opera Theatre Company

Booking (01) 679 4962

FOUR NOTE OPERA

A comic opera with four notes, four singers, a frustrated pianist, and the full range of operatic experience.

Nicola Sharkey, Buddug Verona James,  
Kevin West, Joe Corbett; p. Gavin  
Quinn; d. Aedín Cosgrove and  
Suzanne Cave

28/29 Oct Tallaght Civic Theatre

30/31 Oct: Dublin, Samuel Beckett  
Centre, TCD

3 Nov: Gorey

6 Nov: Waterford; Garterlane Theatre

7 Nov: Cork, Everyman Palace Theatre

9 Nov: Portlaoise, Dunamais Theatre

10 Nov: Tuam, The Mall, Tuam (tbc))

13 Nov: Ballyshannon

14 Nov: Letterkenny

16 Nov: Colrairie, Riverside Theatre

17 Nov: Monaghan, The Garage  
Theatre

19 Nov: Virginia, Co Cavan

20 Nov: Mullingar Arts Centre

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 8 Nov, 8 pm. TSAR AND

BARBER: John Allen previews Opera

Ireland's Winter productions of

Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov and

Rossini's Barber of Seville

## Opera Ireland

Dublin, Gaiety Theatre

Opera Ireland Box Office:

(01) 453 5519

Fax: (01) 453 5521

E-mail: info@opera-ireland.ie

November 20, 22, 24, 26, & 28,

7.30 pm

THE BARBER OF SEVILLE (Rossini)

Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Sam McElroy, Patricia Fernandez, Evan

Bowers, Martti Wallen, Pavel Daniluk,

Mary Brennan; c. David Heusel; p. Paul

Suter; d. Stefanie Pastercamp

November 21, 23, 25, & 27, 7.70 pm

BORIS GODUNOV (Mussorgsky)

Sung in Russian with English surtitles.

Gidon Saks, Christine Freisberg,

Deirdre Cooling Nolan, Michele

Sheridan, Volker Vogel, Oldrich Kriz,

Stanislav Schwets, Ivan Choupenitch,

Gerard O'Connor, Liane Keegan,

William Saetre; c. Alexander

Anissimov; p. Ansgar Haag;

d. Klaus Hellenstein

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 6 Dec, 8 pm. THE KARAJAN

LEGACY: John Allen on the operatic

recordings of the legendary Herbert

von Karajan, who died ten years ago.

## Opera Ireland/Irish Times Lecture

Dublin, Bank of Ireland Arts Centre,  
College Green

Monday 31 Jan, 2000, 8 pm. LADIES  
FIERCE AND FEY: John Allen on 19th-  
century Italian opera heroines.



## SPONSOR PROFILE

From this issue onwards, every edition of *Opera Ireland News* will spotlight one of Opera Ireland's principal sponsors. We are pleased to begin the series by highlighting the contribution of A & L Goodbody Solicitors.

*We are delighted to be among the corporate sponsors of the Opera Ireland Winter Programme for the third year running. We send warmest wishes to the management and casts and we look forward to what promises to be another very entertaining opera season.*



**Frank O'Riordan**

*Managing Director*



A & L Goodbody Solicitors has recently moved to a new purpose-built office complex, situated on North Wall Quay in Dublin's International Financial Services Centre.

Designed by award-winning architects Scott Tallon Walker, the building consists of six stories over basement and will provide state of the art facilities and systems for clients and staff. The design incorporates a glass frontage and large atrium in order to maximise natural light and to provide an airy and spacious feel.